

## Prison Growth Could Cost Up to \$27.5 Billion Over Next 5 Years

Pew Press Releases

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**Washington, DC -- February 14, 2007** -- By 2011 one in every 178 U.S. residents will live in prison, according to a new report released today by the Public Safety Performance Project of The Pew Charitable Trusts. *Public Safety, Public Spending: Forecasting America's Prison Population 2007-2011* projects that by 2011 America will have more than 1.7 million men and women in prison, an increase of more than 192,000 from 2006. That increase could cost taxpayers as much as \$27.5 billion over the next five years beyond what they currently spend on prisons.

“As states continue to struggle with tight budgets and competing priorities among health, education and safety, they are beginning to question whether huge additional investments in prisons are the most effective and economical way of combating crime,” said Susan Urahn, Managing Director of State Policy Initiatives at The Pew Charitable Trusts. “The challenge for state policy makers is to ensure that taxpayers are getting a strong return on their investment in corrections: safer communities, efficient use of public dollars, and ex-offenders who become productive, law-abiding members of society.”

[\*Public Safety, Public Spending\*](#) was prepared for the Trusts by the JFA Institute, a Washington-based, nonprofit research and consulting firm. Among the report's projections for 2011:

- Without policy changes by the states, the nation's incarceration rate will reach 562 per 100,000, or one of every 178 Americans. If you put them all together in one place, the incarcerated population in just five years will outnumber the residents of Atlanta, Baltimore and Denver combined.
- The new inmates will cost states an additional \$15 billion for prison operations over the five-year period. Construction of new prison beds will cost as much as \$12.5 billion.
- Unless Montana, Arizona, Alaska, Idaho and Vermont change their sentencing or release practices, they can expect to see their prison systems grow by one third or more. Similarly, barring reforms, Colorado, Washington, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah and South Dakota can expect their inmate populations to grow by about 25 percent.
- Connecticut, Delaware and New York are projected to see no change in their prison populations. Maryland will see a 1 percent increase in prison population.
- The number of women prisoners is projected to grow by 16 percent, while the male population will increase 12 percent.
- Though the Northeast boasts the lowest incarceration rates, it has the highest costs per prisoner, led by Rhode Island (\$44,860 per prisoner). Louisiana spends the least per prisoner (\$13,009).

Researchers found that while circumstances such as states' demographic changes are influencing the projection estimates, a significant driver of the expected increase in the prison population is the cumulative impact of state policy decisions. These include mandatory minimum prison sentences, reduced parole grant rates, and high recidivism rates, especially among people on parole and probation who are sent to prison for breaking the rules of their release.

“There is more agreement across the political spectrum on criminal justice policy than there has been in a quarter century,” said Adam Gelb, project director of the Public Safety Performance Project. “State policy makers we’ve spoken with want adequate prison space to house violent and serious offenders without breaking the bank by building thousands of new prison beds. And they want to do more than warehouse people. They want to prevent crime by reducing recidivism.”

“Innovative governors and legislators across the country are exploring policies, programs and technologies they believe will save their states money and reduce recidivism,” added Gelb. “They are being joined in this pursuit by judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys, corrections and law enforcement officials, faith-based organizations and community advocates, and others searching for cost-effective solutions backed by credible research and a track record of success.”

The Public Safety Performance Project helps select states diagnose the factors driving prison growth and identify tailored options for reform that draw on solid research, promising approaches and best practices in other states. In partnership with well-respected, nonpartisan experts, including the Council of State Governments and the Vera Institute of Justice, the project initially is working in eight states: Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Rhode Island and Texas.

The project also helps state officials, practitioners and others across the country share state-of-the-art knowledge and ideas through policy forums, public opinion surveys, multi-state meetings, national, regional and state-level convenings and online information about what works.

The full report and additional information about the project and the states in which it is working are available at the project's [Web site](#).

### **About the methodology**

The report projects prison populations using the official forecasts from 42 states and estimates for the eight others. Forty-two states provided their projections directly to the report's researchers. For the eight others, which were unable to provide official projections, researchers calculated estimates using the states' most recent monthly population counts and available admission and release data. The population projected is for state and federal prisons, not jails. Prisons generally hold offenders sentenced to a year or more in custody; jails hold people awaiting trial and serving sentences shorter than a year.

## **About the project**

The [Public Safety Performance Project](#) is an operating project of The Pew Charitable Trusts. The project seeks to help states advance fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices in sentencing and corrections that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable and control corrections costs.

## **About Pew**

The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. We partner with a diverse range of donors, public and private organizations and concerned citizens who share our commitment to fact-based solutions and goal-driven investments to improve society.